

17 APR 1972

82 more dacoits surrender

By V. T. JOSHI

"The Times of India" News Service

JAURA (Madhya Pradesh),

April 16.

IN a fitting finale to Mr. Jaya-prakash Narayan's mission in the Chambal ravines, 70 outlaws led by 35-year-old Madho Singh and another batch of 12 laid down their arms at the feet of the sarvodaya leader at the Gandhi Ashram here today.

They were the second and third batches of bandits to surrender on mass in response to Mr. Narayan's appeal to them to give up their life of violence and return to society.

Mohar Singh, the most dreaded of the bandits and rated second only to the legendary Man Singh, along with 84 outlaws, surrendered to the sarvodaya leader at the same spot on Friday.

Discarding his usual khaki uniform, Madho Singh, who carries a price of more than Rs. 1 lakh on his head, appeared in a dhoti and silken kurta with his handle-bar moustache shaven off.

Sprinting across the dais, Madho Singh briefly addressed a record crowd of about 20,000 who had gathered at

this sleepy hamlet to watch the historic event.

The police had considerable difficulty in controlling the crowd. Mr. Narayan and the chief minister, Mr. P. C. Sethi, repeatedly appealed to the people to remain seated.

It was perhaps for the first time that a dacoit addressed a public meeting. Madho Singh appealed for forgiveness and a chance to lead a new life.

Among those who surrendered today were Harbilas, Jangla Singh (Jangla), Kalyan Singh and Rupa.

The chief minister said the government would treat the problem of dacoits with sympathy. "We will consider it our duty to fulfil Mr. Narayan's assurance to the dacoits."

The deadline for resumption of the police offensive would be extended to April 30 to enable more dacoits to surrender.

Many people feared that the remnants of the gangs which have surrendered might have deliberately refrained from laying down arms to make sure that the government ful-

Continued on Page 7 Column 3

Common court may try dacoits

Continued from Page 1 Column 5

filled its assurances and to intimidate witnesses, he said.

Mr. Sethi said that it would be the responsibility of the government to protect the families of those who surrendered. The government had even suspended administrative and legal authority to enable the bandits to surrender. He appealed to the remnants to follow suit.

The government could not interfere with courts. It would, however, be open to the government to consider mercy petitions sympathetically if capital punishment was awarded to any one.

The governments of MP, Rajasthan and U.P. might constitute a common court for their trial.

Mr. Sethi threatened to take action against a foreign agency which is believed to have taken photographs of the surrendered dacoits.

day was tall and well built Roop Singh, who along with 21 accomplices, had been operating mostly in Rajasthan.

His large piercing eyes and attrac-

tive features marked him out from the ordinary dacoits.

When I met him yesterday at Durera village (near Pagara) the staging post for surrendering bandits, he was surrounded by a large crowd of curious onlookers.

Roop Singh demonstrated his physical prowess and athletic abilities through a feat which must be the envy of any accomplished ballet dancer.

In a smart swing of his right leg, he touched with his foot a twig above his head while he firmly stood on his left foot and held on to his rifle.

The demonstration drew wild applause from the crowd which, just 20 days ago, would have fled at the sight of him.

How did 37-year-old Roop Singh become a bandit? He claimed that on his release after a long term in prison, he was held on a false charge of the wages for his labour in that region.

Among those who witnessed today's surrenderer were Mr. Sethi and Mrs. Prabhawati Narayan.